

VZCZCXRO0032
RR RUEHAG RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLZ RUEHROV
DE RUEHMD #1134/01 3051206
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 311206Z OCT 08
FM AMEMBASSY MADRID
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5497
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHLA/AMCONSUL BARCELONA 3626
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 001134

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/WE, NEA/ELA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SP](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: SYRIAN PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR SHAABAN DENOUNCES U.S.
ATTACKS TO SPANISH POLICY MAKERS

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¶1. SUMMARY. Syrian Presidential Advisor and former Emigration Minister Bouthaina Shaaban addressed a receptive audience of approximately 200 policy makers, diplomats, academics, and students of Arab politics and culture at the Spanish-government sponsored "Casa Arabe" cultural exchange institute the evening of October 28. Describing the U.S. as, "a slave to its failed policies," Shaaban claimed that the attack on Syrian territory was a clear violation of all international agreements and human rights principles. Asked about the Syrian response to the attacks, Shaaban said she couldn't explain why the Government of Syria chose to close a school and cultural center. She centered her 90-minute presentation on the theme that Syria consistently supported peace and stability, despite stereotyping by Western nations and misinformation. Asked about whether the disputed She'baa Farms area was Syrian or Lebanese territory, Shaaban said, "Syria has always agreed it is Lebanese territory, the problem is that the Israelis are occupying the land." Spanish reaction to the attack has been measured. The Spanish MFA released an official communique October 27 expressing its concern for the October 26 military operation in Syrian territory. Spain hoped the events will be clarified soon and called for continued dialogue as the only way to solve the problems of the region. During a press gaggle on October 28 in Peru, Foreign Minister Moratinos said that he had expressed his concern to the Syrian authorities, asked for clarification about the incident, and supported full respect for Syrian territory. END SUMMARY.

¶2. Syrian Presidential Advisor and former Emigration Minister Bouthaina Shaaban addressed a receptive audience of approximately 200 policy makers, diplomats, academics, and students of Arab politics and culture at the Spanish-government sponsored "Casa Arabe" cultural exchange institute the evening of October 28. Secretary General of the Spanish Presidency and key Zapatero advisor, Bernardino Leon, introduced Shaaban as one of Syrian President al-Assad's most influential counselors. He gave a glowing tribute to Shaaban's contributions promoting Middle East peace, mentioning that she had mentored him when he first started attending MEPP negotiations early in his career. Citing Shaaban's courage to, "speak freely and tell the truth," Bernardino Leon told the audience that Syria was a key player in regional dynamics and that attempts to isolate it had failed, proving the effectiveness of Spain's vision of consensus and accord through dialogue.

¶3. Shaaban first noted that despite intense interest regarding the October 26 attack on Syrian territory, she would save her remarks on the incident until the end (note:

Shaaban's visit and Casa Arabe presentation were planned well in advance; she did not conduct meetings at the MFA). She centered her 90-minute presentation on the theme that Syria consistently supported peace and stability, despite stereotyping by Western nations and misinformation. She emphasized that President al-Assad wanted to sign a peace accord, but one that would actually bring peace to people. Syria also sought a return of the Golan to its rightful owners, as well as the right of return for refugees and the restoration of properties confiscated from Palestinians. She noted that Palestinian refugees resident in Syria continued educating their children about their rights, inheritance, and true home to maintain their Palestinian identity even if they were born in Syria.

14. With a nod to Spain's interest in having Barcelona designated as the headquarters of the Union for the Mediterranean, Shaaban said Syria supported the Union as it had the precursor Barcelona Process. She credited Syria with playing an important role facilitating the Arab peace plan developed during the Beirut Conference. Asked about whether the disputed She'baa Farms area was Syrian or Lebanese territory, Shaaban said, "Syria has always agreed it is Lebanese territory, the problem is that the Israelis are occupying the land." Recapping her peace negotiation experience, she claimed that the Oslo Accords and other agreements were simply stalling tactics to allow Israelis to build more settlements, "creating facts on the ground," and expelling Palestinians from their lands. She described the Israeli security wall as, "not for security, but for cutting apart Palestine and marginalizing its people," adding, "if there can't be peace and security for all, there can't be behind the wall." Claiming that the U.S. spread many lies about Syria, Shaaban emphasized that

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Syria had supported Iran against the Saddam regime in Iraq and also supported Kuwait during the Iraqi invasion. Describing 2003, when Syria held a UNSC seat, and 2004-5 as particularly difficult times, she attributed Damascus' troubles to U.S.-spread lies about Syria's military capabilities and intentions.

15. Characterizing the image of an extreme and violent Syria in the Western media as wrong, Shaaban argued that the U.S. was violent and extreme as evidenced by the war in Iraq, which she described as a, "mountain of crimes committed under the pretext of bringing freedom to Iraq. Instead, the women and children of Iraq have suffered unimaginably, with over 4 million people displaced and over 2.5 million of those refugees in Syria." She also said that the relatively small number of Iraqi refugees in the U.S. was proof that the U.S. administration had a lack of commitment and offered only false promises. According to Shaaban, after the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. divided the world into "us versus them" and spread the false message that Arabs are responsible for terrorism. Shaaban also told the audience that the U.S. used Lebanon as a pretext for denigrating Syria. Shaaban claimed that Syria and Lebanon are, "family; we have close, friendly relations and we don't interfere in Lebanese internal affairs." As an example, she claimed the President al-Assad had reached out to March 14 movement members to foster close ties." Note: The Lebanese Ambassador to Spain did not attend the presentation.

16. "The press doesn't reflect what is really happening," Shaaban said, and since the U.S. started its War on Terror, terrorism had actually become more widespread than ever before. The U.S. fomented extremism and ignored the opinions of the "Arab Street", the majority who want the U.S. to respect their unique culture and value system. Describing the U.S. as, "a slave to its failed policies," Shaaban claimed that the attack on Syrian territory was a clear violation of all international agreements and human rights principles and that despite some attempts to justify it as "small", that the death of even one person was the same as

killing a society. Claiming that the U.S. had killed innocent villagers (implying women and children), Shaaban said that her only explanation was that President Bush wanted to show he still had the power to strike out despite his lame duck status. Asked about the Syrian response to the attacks, Shaaban said she couldn't explain why the Government of Syria chose to close a school and cultural center.

¶7. "Democracy is a means, but not an end; it is only an instrument, not the only answer," Shaaban continued, arguing that a democracy should not use aggression to promote its interests. She said that Syria looked forward to increased engagement with Spain as the U.S. role in global affairs had been diminished, adding that the U.S. had lost its credibility and now the rest of the world must re-energize their involvement.

¶8. The format of the program did not provide an opportunity to counter any of Shaaban's statements. Spanish reaction to the attack has been measured. The Spanish MFA released an official communique October 27 expressing its concern for the October 26 military operation in Syrian territory. Spain hoped the events will be clarified soon and called for continued dialogue as the only way to solve the problems of the region. During a press gaggle on October 28 in Peru, Foreign Minister Moratinos said that he had expressed his concern to the Syrian authorities, asked for clarification about the incident, and supported full respect for Syrian territory. Newspaper El Pais, a left-of-center daily, opined that despite Syrian outrage over the "hazy" attack, it was unlikely that there would be any long-term impact on US-Syrian relations. Another publication, El Mundo, described the attack as the bloody work of American cowboys and that in the "official silence of Washington," the focus was on the loss of innocent life. Conservative paper ABC described the attack as exemplifying a "Bush doctrine" that the U.S. will use military force to defend its interest apart from a declaration of war. ABC also speculated that as General Odierno increased pressure on the insurgency, more attacks in Syria were possible.

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